



**Somerset**  
Council

**Customer Strategy**  
**Draft**  
**2023 - 2026**



# Foreword



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## **Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, Lead Member for Communities**

# Introduction

This Customer Strategy outlines the way the council will seek to enable customers to access the services we offer.

The creation of Somerset Council will deliver immediate benefits to our customers in how they access our services. From day one, we will deliver one single telephone enquiry number, website, and a range of customer access points across Somerset.

This document sets out the commitment, priorities, and roadmap to transforming your experience and developing a customer focussed culture within our new organisation.

Our approach is centred on placing you at the heart of shaping and delivering our services. We recognise that listening to customers and using customer data is the strongest foundation of great customer service.

We are committed to achieving the [Customer Service Excellence Standard](#). This is a quality mark that aims to make a difference to customers by encouraging organisations to focus on their needs and provides an opportunity for continuous improvement against a nationally recognised standard.

Our Customer Strategy is therefore based on the five key themes of the excellence standard and will be used by our services to shape their approach to customer service.

Whilst our ambition is to achieve customer service excellence, it is also about being responsible and delivering value for money services too. Services which can be delivered digitally will be, allowing resources to be focused on those services which cannot be delivered digitally and for our most vulnerable customers.

Success will mean that you will always know how to contact us and access our services you will experience the best possible service and have clear expectations. We will use a range of methods to measure our success, learn from feedback and continually improve.

# Why do we need a Customer Strategy?

Providing a single enquiry number, website and a range of customer access points is the start of our journey in developing your customer experience as a new Council. We will then be working behind the scenes to combine the staff, systems, and processes of our previous councils. In doing so, we recognise that we need to take this unique opportunity to improve your experience and align and coordinate the necessary changes across the Council.

Such changes are needed as we recognise that demand for our public services is increasing along with the expectations of greater access, ease of use and quality of customer service. To meet these challenges, we must develop more cost-effective ways for us to engage with you. As such, we will also manage demand for our services by enabling you to self-serve wherever possible so that we can provide value added services to those that need it. This means increasing the number of ways in which you can contact us and striving to provide the best possible customer experience.

We recognise the need to be aspirational in our approach to customer experience and develop responsive, quality services that continually improve and are informed by your feedback.

## Our County, Our Customers

Our customers are anyone who has an interaction with us. This includes residents, children, young people, adults, older people (65+), service users, clients, communities, businesses, and visitors.

We realise not all customers have the same needs and from speaking with some of you already, we are learning how best to serve you as a new Authority.

There is a lot of support out there but a lot of it doesn't take into account those who are digitally excluded

I want to go through customer service, calling them up and getting it sorted there and then. Not having to go through loopholes.

We need to look at the service through the eyes of our partners and service users

Information needs to be clear and easy to understand.

You don't want to tell your story over and over - access to information between partners would be great and ability for people to own their story and tell it once

People get overwhelmed when searching for help and support"

I need to speak to the right person to help sort the problem out

# Our Vision

We will put you, our customers, at the heart of everything we do. We will provide accessible services that are designed around your needs and we will work towards customer service excellence.

## Our Principles

To achieve our vision for customer service we have developed five principles and have set out our ambitions and plans against each of these.

### 1. Customer insights

We understand what you need from us by listening and learning from your feedback.

To achieve this, we will

- Improve by listening to all feedback and using that information to adapt and change.
- Ensure learning is fed into service improvements and we will publish our results.
- Develop our Customer Panel which will be representative of Somerset and work with them, alongside other customers, and stakeholders to shape our services.
- Use a range of methods to engage with you.
- Regularly check your satisfaction with our services.
- Analyse and understand the data that we collect when you contact us.



## 2. Customer focussed culture

We put you, our customers, at the heart of everything we do.

To achieve this, we will

- Place you at the very centre of all that we do. Whatever we do, however, must be cost effective, to ensure good quality and good value.
- Develop a digital first culture throughout the Council. We will design online services with you and support you to access these.
- Provide training to all our staff regarding our approach to customer service and incorporate this into staff induction.
- Empower our staff by providing them with the right skills, tools, and technologies to best serve you.
- Ensure our staff demonstrate customer focused behaviours in the work that they do.
- Ensure our customer principles are used across the Council to shape improvements to our services.
- Share our performance and learning with you. We will tell you what action we have taken, or intend to take, to improve.
- Work to achieve external accreditation of excellence in Customer Service. This will help us identify the strengths and gaps in our customer service and understand what we need to do to improve.



### 3. Information and Access

We deliver our services in ways that meet your needs and ensure our services are accessible.

To achieve this, we will

- Develop quality and easy to understand information, in ways which meet your needs.
- Provide you with a variety of ways to access us.
- Ensure there are opportunities for you to speak with us face to face and review how and where we deliver our face to face services.
- Develop increased digital services to enable you to self-serve.
- Encourage and support you to access our digital services.
- We will use your feedback and the data we collect to improve access to our services and the information we provide.
- Have arrangements in place with all our services, partners, and providers to offer and supply co-ordinated services that benefit you.



## 4. Delivery

We work with you to deliver customer focussed services and learn from best practice.

To achieve this, we will

- Work with you to set challenging delivery standards and regularly review our corporate Customer Promises and Standards.
- Have an easy-to-use complaints procedure and we will have an effective process for the capturing, tracking, resolving, and learning from all your feedback.
- Support our staff to provide the best possible experience to you, invest in their training and understanding of good customer service.
- Learn from best practice from both within and outside of our Council to develop the delivery of our services.
- Compare our performance against national standards for other similar organisations to ensure we are constantly striving for better for you across all our service delivery.



## 5. Timeliness and quality of service

We provide services that meets your needs, to time and to the standards that we agree with you. When we get it wrong, we put it right quickly and learn from our mistakes.

### To achieve this, we will

- Upskill our Customer Services team to provide increased first point of contact resolution.
- Provide reliable, flexible, and responsive services which are continuously improved and delivered cost effectively.
- Provide you with information and updates digitally to reduce the need for you to have to speak to someone to resolve your enquiry.



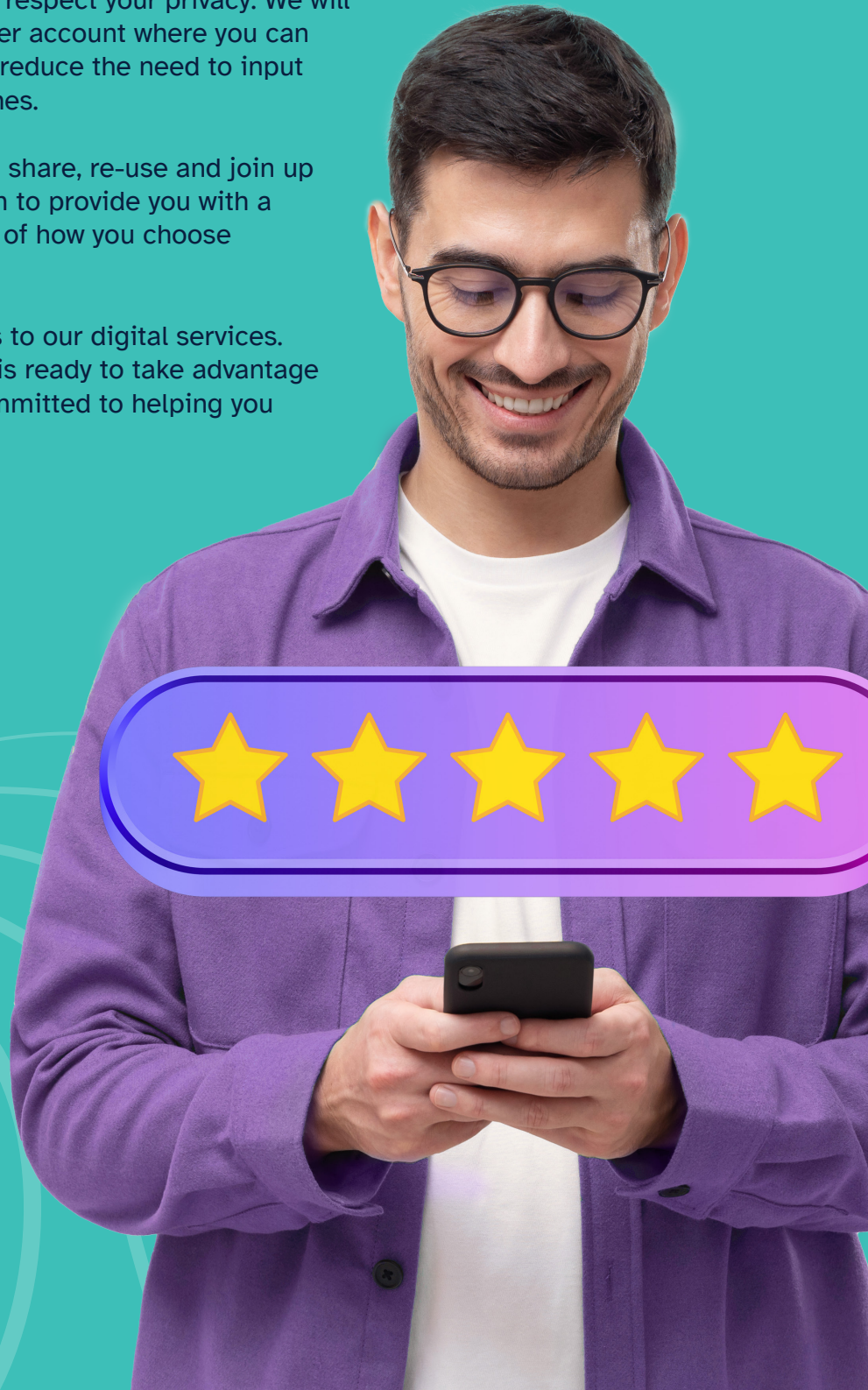


# Digital Customer

We will deliver easy to use digital services, with the aim that you will choose to use these instead of the traditional methods of contact, such as telephone or face-to-face. We refer to this as making our services 'Digital First'.

Our Digital Strategy ([insert link](#)) sets out our ambitions and approach to providing you with a joined up digital experience when you access our online services. To improve your digital customer experience, we will:

- Work with you to design our digital services. We will understand your journey in using our services and understand your needs and preferences.
- Keep your personal data safe and respect your privacy. We will provide you with a secure customer account where you can access and control your data and reduce the need to input the same information multiple times.
- Connect our technologies. We will share, re-use and join up data and our systems with the aim to provide you with a more efficient service, regardless of how you choose to contact us.
- Support and enable you to access to our digital services. We recognise that not everybody is ready to take advantage of our online services and are committed to helping you access these.



# Our roadmap for delivery

	<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Years 2 – 3</b>
	You will benefit from combined contact channels where you can access all Council services.	We will learn from your feedback, put things right when they go wrong and use our learning to plan and develop our future services.	You will be clear as to how your feedback is influencing our services and you will experience improved customer service.
<b>Customer insights</b>	<p>Our new Customer Panel will be in place and ready to provide valuable insights to help shape and design our services.</p> <p>Customer engagement has influenced our Customer Strategy, Promises and Standards.</p>	<p>Data from our Contact Centre system will continue to be analysed so we can learn from you and adapt our contact channels.</p> <p>We will undertake user research to help shape our website and our other channels.</p> <p>We will work with you to improve our approaches to obtaining customer feedback.</p>	<p>We will undertake a review of our Customer Panel to ensure it continues to capture your insights and shaping our services.</p> <p>We will develop customer journey maps for our services, to analyse and inform the design of our services</p>
<b>Customer focussed culture</b>	<p>Our Customer Strategy will be published and will be promoted across the organisation.</p> <p>Our staff will be aware of the new Customer Promise and Standards.</p> <p>A new complaints policy and procedure will be implemented across our organisation.</p>	<p>Training will be designed and delivered for all staff regarding our vision for customer service and their role in delivering this to you.</p> <p>We will undertake a baseline audit of our Customer Service team against the Customer Service Excellence framework to understand areas of development.</p>	<p>Our Customer Services team will achieve the Customer Service Excellence accreditation.</p> <p>We will review our Customer Strategy with our staff and stakeholders.</p>

		<p>Guidance will be developed for our services to ensure changes that are being made are shaped around our customer service themes and principles.</p>	
<p><b>Information and access</b></p>	<p>There will be one single telephone enquiry number to contact the Council.</p> <p>We will have a range of customer access points available across Somerset.</p> <p>There will be a new Somerset Council website, combining all existing services with no reduction in accessibility.</p>	<p>We will work with our partners to develop and integrate their services into appropriate face-to-face locations.</p> <p>We will continually review the effectiveness of our telephony service to ensure we manage demand and plan our resources.</p> <p>We will consolidate and simplify our e-payment systems.</p> <p>We will undertake market testing and procurement activity for a new Customer Engagement Platform.</p>	<p>A transformation programme will be developed to deliver one Customer Engagement Platform.</p> <p>We review the demand for services in our face-to-face locations and organise our resources to meet your needs.</p>
<p><b>Delivery</b></p>	<p>We will introduce new technology so customers can be routed to the most appropriate person as quickly as possible.</p> <p>Customer Service Advisors will be trained and supported to deliver services as one unified Contact Centre for our new Council.</p>	<p>Customer service training will be designed and incorporated into corporate onboarding training.</p> <p>Our approach to customer feedback will be reviewed.</p> <p>Our performance and learning from feedback will be published, including the steps we will take to improve.</p>	<p>We will work with service across the Council to design and improve the online and mediated services that you access.</p> <p>As our services transform, we will work with them to design and deliver training for our Customer Service Advisors, to ensure they are equipped to deal with enquiries as efficiently as possible.</p>

## Timeliness and Quality of Service

Our Customer Promise and Customer Standards will be published so you are aware of the service you should expect from us.

There will be a standard way of providing feedback through a single complaints, compliments, and comments process.

We will publish our performance against our standards and our learning.

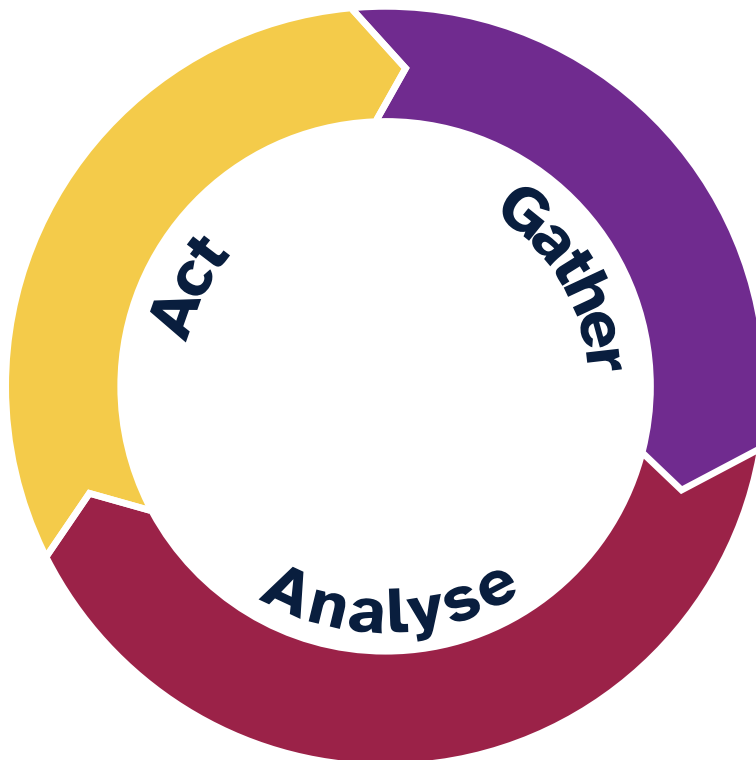
We will develop a single, quality assurance process within our Contact Centre.

We will review our Customer Promise and Customer Standards with you.

We work with our services to develop new service level agreements as our services transform.

The system we use to monitor and track comments, compliments and complaints will be reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose.

## How we will measure our success



### Gather

We will use a variety of methods to obtain your feedback and publishing the results.

### Analyse

We will learn from what you are telling us and work with you to explore solutions.

### Act

We will develop and test solutions with you before implementing them.

## Feedback

We will use your feedback to improve our services and explore new ways of ensuring you can tell us about your experience.

- Customer satisfaction results
- Comments, compliments and complaints
- Customer Panel
- Community groups and organisations
- Focus groups
- Surveys

## Using data

We will use data to better plan our services according to need and demand, and to move towards designing services that predict customers' needs based on what the data tell us.

- Volumes and types of comments, compliments, and complaints
- Trends and patterns
- Levels of achievement against our key performance indicators and SLA's
- Volumes and enquiry types
- Web analytics

## A listening Council - how we will engage with you

### Co-production

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We recognise that listening to customers is the strongest foundation of great customer service.

Working with you helps us to provide the right service at the right time and in the right way and supports the value-for-money objectives we know matter to everyone.

### Co-design

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We will ensure that we work with our customers, Local Community Networks, our partners, businesses, community groups and organisations to co-produce our services and ensure that our services are accessible and inclusive for all our customers.

### Engagement

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To assist us with developing our services, one of the ways we intend to learn more from you is through our Customer Panel.

### Consultation

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This is a group of volunteers including members of the public, businesses, local interest groups and service providers who provide feedback about Somerset Council and its services.

### Informing

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Our aim is to ensure that membership is representative of the people of Somerset.

Customer Panel members are asked to take part in research that will help us:

### Educating

- Understand the needs and preferences of our customers.
- Ensure our services are easy to access and use.
- Identify how and where we as a Council can improve.